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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0060
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 0364

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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GREENPEACE DISRUPTS BIOTECH RICE TRIALS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

11. (SBU) Summary: Activists from the environmental group Greenpeace on June 22 raided a field in Andhra Pradesh's Medak district (45 km north of Hyderabad) to protest against crop trials involving biotech rice conducted by Bayer CropScience (headquartered in Germany). The activists scaled the fence surrounding the field and displayed posters and other paraphernalia criticizing biotech products, intending to draw press and public attention to the trials. A local Bayer representative told us that the company had received all necessary permissions for the trials, but local government officials told us that they were unaware of them. It appears that Bayer received approval at the national level, but that there is no mechanism in place to transfer awareness of such approvals to the state level. End Summary.

Greenpeace raids biotech crop trials

12. (U) Greenpeace activists on June 22 raided a field in Chinnakanjarla village (Andhra Pradesh) owned by Bayer CropScience, scaling the wall surrounding the field and displaying posters and other paraphernalia condemning biotech products and suggested the alleged dangers they bring. A local Greenpeace official told us that the event was "an effort to raise awareness among the local farming community on the dangers posed by agricultural biotech companies." He also said that trials of biotech products could "shut Indian rice out of the international market." Bayer CropScience's private security guards escorted the activists off the premises and the company filed a formal trespass complaint at the local police station.

Bayer says it did nothing wrong

13. (SBU) A top Bayer CropScience official told us that the company had received the necessary clearance for the trial of biotech rice at the site from the Government of India's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC). He added that the company had taken steps (like building the wall around the site) to ensure that the trial would not contaminate other crops in the area. Another Bayer official speculated that Greenpeace was perturbed by the company's outreach efforts to local farmers. He explained that Bayer had brought several groups of farmers on educational tours of the site, and that Greenpeace activists believed that such tours were a form of manipulation intended to create a more favorable political/social climate for the introduction of biotech crops.

Andhra Pradesh government caught unaware

14. (SBU) One of the more curious twists to this episode is that local officials were caught completely off-guard, unaware that Bayer's trial was taking place. Dr. Raghava Reddy, a member of Andhra Pradesh's Biotechnology Coordination Committee (and Vice Chancellor of Hyderabad's Ranga Agricultural University) told us

that GEAC had not informed his committee about Bayer's trials. Our contacts within the state's Agriculture Department were similarly unaware, and told us that they -- prompted by press reports of the Greenpeace raid -- were checking with national authorities to determine whether or not Bayer had actually received GEAC approval. He added that his department was "drafting a report" on the situation, presumably in an effort to examine why local officials were unaware of Bayer's trial.

Comment

15. (SBU) We have no reason to doubt Bayer's claims that it received all appropriate approvals from GEAC. We find it somewhat surprising that a company of Bayer's international reputation apparently did not think it advantageous to communicate its plans to local authorities. Environmental activists have staged protests against biotech products -- and the companies researching them -- before, and we would have thought that Bayer would have been sensitive to potential security issues, requiring the cooperation of local government. It is also instructive, but perhaps less surprising, that the GEAC appears to have no mechanism in place for notifying state or local governments about crop trials it has approved. End Comment.

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